

Stewardship / Matters Of The Heart: Lesson 10

The Role Of Stewardship

Memory Text: “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.” (1 Thessalonians 4:7)

Setting The Stage: “Character is much better kept than recovered.” – Thomas Paine
The gospel is about the transformation of the character, becoming like Jesus through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We’ve been talking about stewardship. And while there are many facets to it, it’s really very simple. Stewardship is related to character.

How are stewardship and character related? Essentially, stewardship reveals character; it reveals whether Christ has gotten a hold of our hearts. Stewardship is not only about understanding and knowing what is the right thing, the wise thing to do, it’s about putting that knowledge of truth into practical use in our every day lives.

Christ-likeness is not a garment to be put on and taken off at will. It’s not something we put on during the Sabbath hours or while we’re at church, then take off when we get home and keep off the rest of the week when at work/school. If Christ has a hold of our hearts, then it will permeate everything—our thinking, our attitudes, our decisions, and our actions—and will be with us everywhere.

Character is built on the foundation of thought and feelings. Thoughts and feelings lead to action (simply, “Those cookies look good!”). The repetition of actions reveals character. Ultimately, character determines our destiny (training for a marathon).

Keep this relationship between stewardship and character in mind as we review this week’s lesson.

Sunday – Christ As The Center

Colossians 1:16-18; John 5:39; 2 Corinthians 5:17

I’ve always enjoyed riding a bike. Got my first bike when a kid. Loved to ride it around the neighborhood and visit friends. Rode it to high school nearly every day. But when you get your first car, there’s nothing like it in the world.

Now a bike, a car, trucks and buses can’t get very far without wheels, and even if they had wheels, they can’t get very far without axles. An axle is a rod around which a wheel moves or rotates. And unfortunately, there are people in the world today who believe the wheel of life revolves around them.

Some people suffer from the center of the universe syndrome. You know them. They're the ones who jump the line at the grocery store, or drive slow in the fast lane, or love to talk about themselves more than show interest in others. The world is filled with people who think the world revolves around them. Many people lack awareness and don't care about what's happening around them. They worship, but they worship the unholy trinity—me, myself, and I. But there is only One whom everything centers—Jesus!

What do the following verses tell us about just how central Jesus is to everything about us?

Colossians 1:16-18: “For by [in—the center, the source]] Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist [hold together]. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

John 5:39: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

“Jesus is the living center of everything.” (Evangelism, p. 186)

There is no genuine stewardship without Christ being our central core (Gal. 2:20). He is the center of “that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), and “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Col. 1:17).

Just as the axle is the center of the wheel and therefore carries the weight of a bike or vehicle, Christ is the center of the steward's life. Just as a solid axle provides stability allowing the wheels to rotate, Jesus is also the fixed and stable center of our Christian existence (Heb. 13:8).

“Christ's influence should affect everything we think and do. All aspects of stewardship rotate around and find their center in Christ. “ ‘For without Me you can do nothing’ ” (John 15:5). The center of stewardship is not a hollow void but the reality of the living Christ, who is working in us to mold our characters now and for eternity.”

It's one thing to say that Jesus is the core of our lives, but it's another to live as if He is. **How can we be sure that Jesus is living in us as He promises if we let Him in?**

We remember that Christ is not only Savior but also Lord of our lives. This means we let Him call the shots. When inclined to push into line, we follow the Jesus-

inspired inclination to be patient and wait. When tempted to let someone “have it” we do what Jesus would do and speak softly. When you feel like indulging in something that isn’t good for you, you recall Jesus’ fasted 40 days for you thus paving the way for victory over appetite. May Jesus have his way in our lives each moment and each day. What do you say?

Monday – Sanctuary Doctrine

Psalm 77:13; Hebrews 8:1; Daniel 8:14

The sanctuary doctrine contains the most important truth for last-day living. Rightly taught, the sanctuary deepens our understanding of the plan of salvation and the principles of stewardship. But before we can appreciate the link between salvation and the principles of stewardship as taught by the sanctuary, we first need to grasp the significance of the sanctuary doctrine itself, including its importance to our faith.

The sanctuary service was at the center of the Jewish faith. God had said to Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” (Ex. 25:8) The sanctuary and its services was a living illustration of the gospel, the plan of salvation. The lamb that died at the hand of the penitent sinner represented Christ, the true Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The ministering priest represented Christ as our interceding priest in heaven (Heb. 8:1). The work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement represented Christ as our Judge and High Priest bringing to a close the work of salvation. It’s no wonder David said:

Psalm 77:13: “Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?”

And that we read: *“The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth.”* (The Great Controversy, p. 488)

The sanctuary doctrine is like the hub of a wheel. The hub attaches to the axle and provides more stability for the wheel when it turns. Christ, through His perfect life, death, and resurrection, is the foundation for His work in the sanctuary (Heb. 6:19, 20) and provides stability for our faith.

The High Priest’s role on the Day of Atonement reveals that Christ isn’t just our Mediator in heaven’s sanctuary, but He is also our Judge. Since 1844 (see Dan. 8:14) Jesus has been serving as both. The two are intimately entwined in His last-day ministry (John 5:27; 1 John 2:1). The time prior to Jesus’ return involves the evaluation of all those who have professed to follow Christ...to discover who truly has believed in Jesus. Jesus taught a parable that deals with this subject.

Matthew 22:1-14. So we observe that the work of judgment is an evaluation of the character of God's people, as symbolized by the wedding garment. The judgment cuts through mere profession to find out who really is Christ's and really has Christ living and dwelling in their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 7:21-23).

Yet, how does this investigative judgment of the character of God's people specifically tie into stewardship? The pen of inspiration clearly illuminates the role of stewardship in the investigative judgment.

"In the judgment the use made of every talent will be scrutinized. How have we employed the capital lent us of Heaven? Will the Lord at His coming receive His own with usury? Have we improved the powers entrusted us, in hand and heart and brain, to the glory of God and the blessing of the world? How have we used our time, our pen, our voice, our money, our influence? What have we done for Christ, in the person of the poor, the afflicted, the orphan, or the widow? God has made us the depositaries of His holy Word; what have we done with the light and truth given us to make men wise unto salvation? No value is attached to a mere profession of faith in Christ; only the love which is shown by works is counted genuine. Yet it is love alone which in the sight of Heaven makes any act of value. Whatever is done from love, however small it may appear in the estimation of men, is accepted and rewarded of God." (The Great Controversy, p. 487)

The author asks a series of six soul-searching questions. How would you answer these questions?

Tuesday – Christ-Centered Doctrinal Beliefs

John 14:6; Ephesians 4:21-24; Philippians 3:8-11

The sanctuary is central because it's where the great truth of salvation is expressed so powerfully, where the meaning of the gospel is revealed. And all of our doctrines, one way or another, must be linked to the gospel. Like the spokes of a wheel, doctrines must be connected to the great truth of salvation by faith in Jesus (John 5:39).

"The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster..." (The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1137)

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Doctrines aren't just abstract theological ideas; all true doctrine is anchored in Christ, and all should in various ways impact how we live. The role of stewardship is to live doctrinal truth as it is in Jesus, and to do so in a way that positively affects the quality of our lives and the lives of those around us.

Ephesians 4: 21-24: “You have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

Philippians 3:8-11: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Being a steward isn't just about believing doctrines, however true those doctrines are; being a steward means living out those truths in our lives and in our interaction with others (Matt. 25 – the parable of the virgins, the talents, and the sheep & goats).

Wednesday – The Three Angels Messages

Revelation 14:6-12; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 6:1-4

“The third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and this truth must be brought before the world; but the great Center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel’s message...”
(Evangelism, p. 184)

Jesus, the great Center, must be found in every doctrine we present (Sabbath, state of the dead, second coming, spirit of prophecy). Jesus didn't say, “If doctrines be lifted up, they will draw men to me.” He said, “If I be lifted up...” (John 12:32) We must have doctrines. If we don't it would be like trying to build a house without framework. It would be like a body without bones—no rigidity, no strength. But doctrines without Christ would be lifeless, useless theory that has no converting power.

Only twice has God warned the world of coming catastrophe: once to Noah (Gen. 6:13–18, Matt. 24:37) and the other through the three angels' messages. These messages pull back the curtain to reveal current and future world events.

Revelation 14:6–12. What responsibility rests upon us in regard to these messages, and how does stewardship fit in?

As Seventh-day Adventists, our mission is to share the truth of the three angels' messages in preparation for the second coming of Christ. People have to be able to make a decision regarding eternity. The role of stewardship is a partnership with God in mission.

2 Corinthians 5:20: “ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 6:1–4: “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses.”

“In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 19)

The rim of a wheel is near the point of contact with the ground and represents the mission of the three angels’ messages. Their mission is to protect against theological drift and to identify our responsibility in the last-days. We are to be stewards of this message, proclaiming it to the world.

It’s so easy, as we think of last-day events, to get caught up in charts and dates. They have their role, but as we seek to preach this message to the world, we need to keep Jesus and His sacrifice and High Priestly ministry front and center.

Thursday – Stewardship

1 Peter 1:15, 16

1 Peter 1:15, 16: “ But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’ “

When we come to Christ with penitent and surrendered hearts, He makes us holy—He separates us unto Himself for a special purpose. Then the Holy Spirit, each and every day, as we stay surrendered, works His holiness into every facet of our lives. We grow in God’s grace.

How is holiness related to stewardship? Holiness is living wholly for God. It’s brought into every aspect of our lives. It’s not like a pair of shoes that you put on and take off when you please. Christianity is not something we do, it’s something we are. It affects the tone of our voice, the attitudes we carry around, how we treat one another, how we spend our time, talents, and treasures.

Stewardship is where our spiritual lives meet our practical lives. Have you heard of the saying, “Where the rubber meets the road?” The tire on the rim of your car can

represent the concept of stewardship. It's where our faith meets the ups and downs of life through successes and failures. It's where our beliefs get real in the rough-and-tumble scuffles of daily living.

"Stewardship is the outer wrapping of who we are and what we do. It is a witness of our conduct and of a life well managed. Our daily actions that reveal Christ are like the rubber on the wheel that touches the road."

Bridgestone Tire's motto used to be, "Passion for Excellence." Isn't that the Christian's approach to stewardship, to Christian living? Bridgestone's latest slogan is, "Time to perform."

Perhaps some of us here haven't been living up to God's desire and expectations for our lives and you see that, and you realize it's time to let Jesus be Lord of your life, it's time to be the last-day steward God desires me to be. Maybe others have come to see that excellence doesn't mark their Christian lives anymore. For some reason things aren't the same. Boredom and apathy have set in. But you realize it's time to let Jesus work in you again. Let's each make Jesus center of our lives. What do you say?